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Review of Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison. By Ken Zontek. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, xvi + 249 pp. Maps, photographs, appendix, notes, references, index. \$19.95 paper.

Ken Zontek presents a thoroughly researched and generally well-written account of the underappreciated role played by American Indians in the conservation and restoration of American bison. He notes that of the five foundation herds that in the 1870s became the principal gene pool for today's Plains bison, three of them were established by people of American Indian descent.

In more recent years, American Indians have organized the Intertribal Bison Cooperative (ITBC), currently consisting of more than 50 tribes with a combined total of over 15,000 bison and growing rapidly. Zontek estimates that with the available land on ITBC member reservations, the organization is capable of sustaining about 120,000 bison. The cultural and spiritual ties between Indians and bison lead to management practices that differ in important ways from those of most commercial bison ranchers. Fred DuBray, leading founder of the ITBC, advocates the maintenance of the "wild integrity" of the species as a principal justification for restoring bison on tribal lands. The ITBC rejects intensive management practices and favors grass-fed over grain-fed bison.

American Indians were also in the forefront of the Yellowstone brucellosis controversy and objected strongly to the slaughter of bison that left the park. About 20%-25% of Yellowstone bison test positive serologically for brucellosis, and authorities in Montana feared that the disease could spread to cattle. Zontek rightly notes that elk have an even higher frequency of positive tests for brucellosis, yet there is no outcry concerning risks to cattle posed by the thousands of elk that leave the park every year. Interestingly, Zontek quotes an anonymous official from the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission regarding another motive for slaughtering bison and ignoring elk. If the public accepts free-ranging bison on National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands, the agencies may reduce forage allocated to livestock.

One chapter compares the relationship between Indians and bison in Canada and the U.S. Indians in Canada generally play more direct roles in the management of public herds than they do in the U.S., in part a result of

conditions specified in treaties. On the other hand, there is no equivalent of the ITBC in Canada. Canada also has wood bison, officially recognized as a threatened subspecies, and therefore not raised commercially. Even so, the Wood Bison Recovery Team sought the assistance of Canadian Indians for the restoration of wood bison.

The final chapter presents the author's perspective on the bison's future and the increasing role played by Indians in shaping it. Zontek is optimistic regarding the outlook for truly free-ranging bison at increasingly larger scales, particularly in the Northern Plains. He draws on the Poppers' "Buffalo Commons" idea and its implementation in 19 counties in western South Dakota. He extols the economic advantages of bison over cattle, quoting a rancher as saying, "What it comes down to is this: bison are half the work and twice the money." **James H. Shaw**, *Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management, Oklahoma State University*.